



WESTERN CAUCUS NEWS

Western Caucus Introduces Bill to Stop the Literal Expansion of the Federal Government

For Immediate Release
March 14, 2005

Contact: Cody Stewart
202-226-5793

WASHINGTON, D.C.- Ten members of the Western Caucus from seven different states introduced a bill that would stop the expansion of the vast holdings of lands in the West, and begin the process of selling these valuable holdings back to the public. Rep. Jeff Flake (AZ), the author of the bill and Vice Chairman of the Caucus, said that the proposal represented a first step in making the government begin relinquishing land back to the people where it can be used productively.

"The federal government spends about \$200 million a year to acquire new land, when it can't even take care of the land it's got," said Flake. "Rather than buying new land, I think it's clear to those of us in the West that the federal government ought to be turning that land over to private hands, where it can be managed more efficiently and used more productively."

The bill would require that any acquisition of more than 100 acres of new federal land in the West (defined as states with 25 percent or more of federal lands) be offset by a corresponding sale of existing holdings of equal or greater value. In 13 Western states, 51.9% of the land is owned by the federal government. In the 37 other states, only 4.1% is federally owned. While the federal government promised in these Western states' enabling acts that they would sell a portion of these federal lands and dedicate the funds to state projects, the government has instead increased its holdings

Rep. Chris Cannon (UT), Chairman of the Western Caucus, said that the federal government should fully fund the Payment in Lieu of Taxes (PILT) program, which is designed to compensate states for the tax revenue lost because federal lands cannot be taxed, before it buys and new land. An estimated \$4.2 billion in property tax revenue is lost every year from these federal lands. Acquiring new federal holdings will only increase PILT obligations, without any increase in funding to compensate these communities.

Also co-sponsoring the bill were Representatives Rob Bishop (UT), Barbara Cubin (WY), John Doolittle (CA), John Duncan (TN), Marilyn Musgrave (CO), Butch Otter (ID), Mike Simpson (ID), and Tom Tancredo (CO). Companion legislation introduced in the Senate by Senator Craig Thomas (WY) was co-sponsored by Senator Mike Enzi (WY), Senator Ted Stevens (AK), and Senator Conrad Burns (MT).

The Western Caucus is comprised of members of Congress committed to protecting the interests and ideals of the West. The mission of the Western Caucus is to focus on improving the quality of life in rural areas through policies that promote limited government, individual liberty, and economic opportunity.